NUMB. XII.

The GUARDIAN.

Vel quia nil rectum, niſi quod placuit ſibi, ducunt:
Vel quia turpe putant parere minoribus—— Hor.

Wedneſday, March 25. 1713.

WHEN a Poem makes its firſt Appearance in the World, I have always obſerved, that it gives Employment to a greater number of Criticks, than any other kind of Writing. Whether it be that moſt Men, at ſome time of their Lives, have try'd their Talent that way, and thereby think they have a right to judge; or whether they imagine, that their making ſhrewd Obſervations upon the Polite Arts, gives them a pretty figure; or whether there may not be ſome Jealouſie and Caution in beſtowing Applauſe upon thoſe who write chiefly for Fame. Whatever the Reaſons be, we find few diſcouraged by the Delicacy and Danger of ſuch an Undertaking.

I think it certain, that moſt Men are naturally not only capable of being pleaſed with that which raiſes agreeable Pictures in the Fancy, but willing alſo to own it. But then there are many, who, by falſe Applications of ſome Rules ill underſtood, or out of Deference to Men whoſe Opinions they value, have formed to themſelves certain Schemes and Syſtems of Satisfaction, and will not be pleaſed out of their own way. Theſe are not Criticks themſelves, but Readers of Criticks, who, without the Labour of peruſing Authors, are able to give their Characters in general; and know juſt as much of the ſeveral Species of Poetry, as thoſe who read Books of Geography do of the Genius of this or that People or Nation. Theſe Gentlemen deliver their Opinions ſententiouſly, and in general Terms; to which it being impoſſible readily to frame compleat Anſwers, they have often the Satisfaction of leaving the Board in Triumph. As young Perſons, and particularly the Ladies, are liable to be led aſide by theſe Tyrants in Wit, I ſhall examine two or three of the many Stratagems they uſe, and ſubjoin ſuch Precautions as may hinder candid Readers from being deceived thereby.

The firſt I ſhall take Notice of is an Objection commonly offered, *viz. That ſuch a Poem hath indeed ſome good Lines in it, but it is not a regular Piece.* This for the moſt part is urged by thoſe whoſe Knowledge is drawn from ſome famous *French* Criticks, who have written upon the Epic Poem, the Drama, and the great kinds of Poetry, which cannot ſubſiſt without great Regularity; but ought by no means to be required in Odes, Epiſtles, Panegyricks, and the like, which naturally admit of greater Liberties. The Enthuſiaſm in Odes and the Freedom of Epiſtles is rarely diſputed; But I have often heard the Poems upon Publick Occaſions written in Heroic Verſe, which I chuſe to call Panegyricks, ſeverely cenſured upon this Account; the Reaſon whereof I cannot gueſs, unleſs it be, that becauſe they are written in the ſame kind of Numbers and Spirit as an Epic Poem, they ought therefore to have the ſame Regularity. Now an Epic Poem, conſiſting chiefly in Narration, it is neceſſary that the Incidents ſhould be related in the ſame Order that they are ſuppoſed to have been tranſacted. But in Works of the above-mentioned kind, there is no more Reaſon that ſuch Order ſhould be obſerved, than that an Oration ſhould be as methodical as an Hiſtory. I think it ſufficient that the great Hints, ſuggeſted from the Subject, be ſo diſpoſed, that the firſt may naturally prepare the Reader for what follows, and ſo on; and that their Places cannot be changed without Diſadvantage to the whole. I will add further, that ſometimes gentle Deviations, ſometimes bold and even abrupt Digreſſions, where the Dignity of the Subject ſeems to give the Impulſe, are Proofs of a noble Genius; as winding about, and returning artfully

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fully to the main Deſign, are Marks of Addreſs and Dexterity.

Another Artifice made uſe of by Pretenders to Criticiſm, is an Inſinuation, *That all that is good is borrowed from the Ancients.* This is very common in the Mouths of Pedants, and perhaps in their Hearts too; but is often urged by Men of no great Learning, for Reaſons very obvious. Now Nature being ſtill the ſame, it is impoſſible for any Modern Writer to paint her otherwiſe than the Ancients have done. If, for Example, I were to deſcribe the General's Horſe at the Battel of *Blenheim*, as my Fancy repreſented ſuch a noble Beaſt, and that Deſcription ſhould reſemble what *Virgil* hath drawn for the Horſe of his Hero, it would be almoſt as ill-natured to urge that I had ſtolen my Deſcription from *Virgil*, as to reproach the Duke of *Marlborough* for fighting only like *Æneas*. All that the moſt exquiſite Judgment can perform is, out of that great Variety of Circumſtances, wherein natural Objects may be conſidered, to ſelect the moſt beautiful; and to place Images in ſuch Views and Lights, as will affect the Fancy after the moſt delightful manner. But over and above a juſt Painting of Nature, a learned Reader will find a new Beauty ſuperadded in a happy Imitation of ſome famous Ancient, as it revives in his Mind the Pleaſure he took in his firſt reading ſuch an Author. Such Copyings as theſe give that kind of double Delight which we perceive when we look upon the Children of a beautiful Couple; where the Eye is not more charm'd with the Symmetry of the Parts, than the Mind by obſerving the Reſemblance tranſmitted from Parents to their Offspring, and the mingled Features of the Father and the Mother. The Phraſes of Holy Writ, and Alluſions to ſeveral Paſſages in the Inſpired Writings, (though not produced as Proofs of Doctrine) add Majeſty and Authority to the nobleſt Diſcourſes of the Pulpit: In like manner an Imitation of the Air of *Homer* and *Virgil* raiſes the Dignity of modern Poetry, and makes it appear ſtately and venerable.

The laſt Obſervation I ſhall make at preſent is upon the Diſguſt taken by thoſe Criticks, who put on their Cloaths prettily, and diſlike every thing that is not written *with Eaſe*. I hereby therefore give the genteel part of the learned World to underſtand, that every Thought which is agreeable, and expreſt in Language ſuitable to it, is written with Eaſe. There are ſome Things which muſt be written with Strength, which nevertheleſs are eaſie. The Statue of the *Gladiator*, though repreſented in ſuch a Poſture as ſtrains every Muſcle, is as eaſie as that of *Venus*; becauſe the one expreſſes Strength and Fury as naturally as the other doth Beauty and Softneſs. The Paſſions are ſometimes to be rouzed, as well as the Fancy to be entertained; and the Soul to be exalted and enlarged, as well as ſoothed. This often requires a raiſed and figurative Stile; which Readers of low Apprehenſions, or ſoft and languid Diſpoſitions (having heard of the Words *Fuſtian* and *Bombaſt*) are apt to reject as ſtiff and affected Language. But Nature and Reaſon appoint different Garbs for different Things; and ſince I write this to the Men of Dreſs, I will ask them if a Soldier, who is to mount a Breach, ſhould be adorned like a Beau, who is ſpruced up for a Ball?

This Paper is to be had of Mr. Yemes *under the* Thatch'd-houſe *Tavern in St.* James's-ſtreet; *Mrs.* Bond *at* Charing-croſs; *Mrs.* Bolter *near the* Temple-gate; *and Mr.* Round *in* Exchange-Ally.

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